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SUBJECT: A/S FRIED'S VISIT TO SERBIA YIELDS FEW SURPRISES

Classified by: Ambassador Michael C. Polt, reasons 1.4
(b,d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Ambassador Fried used his March 5-6 visit to Belgrade to focus Serbia's leadership and youth on the country's long-term future as a Euro-Atlantic partner. The A/S encouraged both Tadic and Kostunica to take strong measures to give Serbia a European future regardless of the Kosovo outcome. He congratulated them on Serbia's PfP invitation and reminded them of the responsibilities that being an aspiring NATO member entails -- including full cooperation with the ICTY -- while stressing U.S. willingness to help throughout the NATO accession process, if Serbia were interested and willing to do its part. Tadic voiced readiness to seize Serbia's European future whatever the outcome of Kosovo's status. Kostunica appeared content to hunker down and complain. End Summary.

KOSOVO: TADIC PRAGMATIC, KOSTUNICA RETRENCHING

12. (C) In separate meetings with President Tadic, PM Kostunica, and outgoing FONMIN Draskovic on March 5, A/S Fried encouraged his interlocutors to look past the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo negotiations and to bring Serbia into a Euro-Atlantic future. He underscored that he did not expect them to welcome or even endorse an independent Kosovo, but did expect them to accept its reality and focus on the best interests of the Serbian people. He noted that many of Serbia's proposed amendments to the Ahtisaari plan -- for instance, the references to Serbia negotiating post-status security arrangements directly with the UN -- were simply not workable. Fried encouraged both Tadic and Kostunica to go to Vienna on March 10 for the final Elephant Round of negotiations armed with practical suggestions to optimize the protection of the Kosovo Serb community under the Ahtisaari plan; serious proposals would get a serious hearing. He warned them not to count on a Russian veto in the UNSC and emphasized that only a UNSC resolution would guarantee an international presence in Kosovo that could protect Kosovo Serbs from Albanian extremist violence and longer-term pressure.

13. (S) Tadic -- expectedly forward-looking and wishing to appear cooperative -- stressed that he could not publicly endorse independence for Kosovo but that he would continue to negotiate and would not support acts of violence. He distanced himself from the tactics of his Vienna negotiators, saying that they had a narrow mandate and were captives of domestic public opinion. Tadic (protect) assured the A/S that he would go to Vienna on March 10 and floated the idea of making international oversight of Serbian religious and cultural sites in Kosovo a permanent arrangement. He did not ask for a postponement of the Vienna talks, and he did not mention either partition of

Kosovo or even a Serbian entity within Kosovo. He said he had not spoken with the Russians about a UNSC veto and is not counting on such an outcome.

14. (S) Above all, Tadic -- who tacitly acknowledged the impending loss of Kosovo -- stressed that he would strive for a European future after Kosovo had been resolved. The A/S told him that Euro-Atlantic integration is attainable for all Serbs and that Tadic, as a well-respected and forward-looking Serbian patriot, is the only leader capable of bringing his country into NATO and the EU. He reminded Tadic that the U.S. supported him but could only do so much; the drive for a Euro-Atlantic future must come from Belgrade. At the end of their one-on-one discussion following the meeting, Tadic noted that the international community should have made Kosovo independent in 1999, "when Milosevic was in power."

15. (C) Kostunica was dour, though not hostile. He said that Serbia would continue to insist on its territorial integrity and would at the final Elephant Round offer nothing but a principled defense of Serbia's continued sovereignty over Kosovo. While paying lip service to Serbia's European future, he spent most of the discussion attacking Ahtisaari, using his customary legalistic arguments. He accused Ahtisaari of bias toward the Albanian side, of solely pursuing a "solution" rather than a compromise, and of overstepping his mandate by attempting to redraw Serbia's borders. He repeatedly invoked the UN Charter and its purported protection of Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, stressing that a compromise would only be possible within that framework. He complained that Serbia is now facing a Kosovo Albanian perception (vice reality) that Kosovo will gain independence, which he claims makes it difficult for

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Belgrade to negotiate with Pristina.

16. (C) The A/S urged Kostunica to think of Serbia's European future and not to destroy the chances for Kosovo's Serb community to continue to live there. Kostunica did not give much of a response, except to say that Serbia would defend its principles. He complained that if UN 1244 had been fully implemented, the Kosovo Serb IDPs would have been able to return to and integrate within Kosovo long ago. A/S Fried told Kostunica that the most recent case of intimidation of Kosovo Serbs was at the hands of other Kosovo Serbs: extremists who forcibly broke up a moderate Serb meeting in Gracanica the previous weekend. The extremists seemed to enjoy Serbian government backing, which must cease. Kostunica, surprised, defended the intimidation as "just politics, as in Belgrade."

17. (C) Draskovic pushed the "one Serbia, two systems" proposal he promulgated last week, likening Kosovo to Cyprus or Taiwan. Like Tadic, he seemed well aware of the reality of Kosovo's impending separation from Serbia, and he told the A/S that he fears popular support for Euro-Atlantic integration will plummet when Kosovo becomes independent. A/S Fried applauded Draskovic's historic role as a Serbian patriot, but noted that such a "One Serbia" approach would not be feasible. Ambassador Polt stressed that the U.S. is counting on Draskovic to lend his powerful, popular voice to the Serbian people and encourage them to embrace a European future.

RELATIONS WITH NATO

18. (C) Both Tadic and Draskovic thanked the A/S for the U.S.'s support for Serbia's admission to PfP. Tadic repeatedly emphasized that NATO membership is a high priority for him and that the inclusion of all Balkan countries in NATO would be critical for regional stability. The A/S stressed that Tadic's letter had convinced the Secretary to support PfP for Serbia because she trusted

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Tadic's judgment that PpP would help the pro-Western forces in Serbia. (Kostunica made no references to PpP or NATO during his discussions.)

¶9. (C) The A/S reminded Tadic of the two obstacles between Serbia and NATO: ICTY fugitive Ratko Mladic and a clear consensus within Serbia in favor of joining NATO. Tadic acknowledged that only 35-40 percent of Serbs held a positive view of NATO but opined that most Serbs think it is important to join NATO even if they dislike the organization. The A/S offered to work with Belgrade on a NATO accession strategy, emphasizing that these plans have worked well for all countries that have requested them. He promised Tadic that Serbia would not be left out but stressed that Belgrade's full support for and cooperation in that accession plan would be crucial.

¶10. (C) Tadic said he was pleased with what he had been able to accomplish so far on defense reform and had insisted to Kostunica that defense reforms must continue under the new government. He asked for increased IMET funding so that Belgrade could proceed with these reforms as quickly as possible. Ambassador Polt replied that Belgrade must demonstrate marked progress on issues like implementing the SOFA and GLOC and cooperating with the ICTY before we could make a robust argument for additional IMET funding.

ICTY

¶11. (C) Tadic told the A/S he hopes to push through parliament a resolution condemning the Srebrenica massacre and maintained that cooperation with the ICTY, including Mladic's arrest and transfer to The Hague, will top his agenda in the new government. Although he is displeased with the lack of movement on ICTY cooperation under the outgoing DSS government, Tadic said that in last week's coalition talks, both DS and DSS had agreed on the importance of fulfilling Serbia's obligations toward the ICTY. Tadic stressed, however, that full ICTY cooperation would not be possible until a government is in place. Kostunica also briefly mentioned ICTY cooperation, acknowledging that it was essential for Euro-Atlantic integration, but he made no explicit reference to Mladic.

NEW GOVERNMENT PROSPECTS

¶12. (C) Tadic said that he expects a stable government to be formed in mid-March and would encourage a coalition with DSS, Mladjan Dinkic's G17 Plus, Cedomir Jovanovic's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and all minority parties -- though he acknowledged that this arrangement is unlikely given the

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refusal of DSS and LDP to work together. Kostunica expressed satisfaction with the elections, adding that he is looking ahead to the municipal, provincial, and presidential elections later this year. He also indicated approval of the new constitution, saying that it establishes a modern, democratic framework for the laws Serbia is trying to pursue.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Tadic and Kostunica are clearly wearied by the Kosovo process, with Kostunica grasping at straws with his legalistic arguments and Tadic just wanting the process to be over. We should look to March 10 as an opportunity to take reasonable Serb proposals, if Tadic makes them (and he might have to make them offline), so that Ahtisaari can stand before the UNSC and honestly say that he took every reasonable, workable proposal he got from either side. Of course, Tadic may not be able to present even those suggestions he raised informally with the A/S. And even if

he does and Ahtisaari incorporates them, Kostunica will trash the agreement (and Tadic will not be willing to defend it). Still, we knew that no Serbian politician, or at least not a leading one, would accept the package. So the best we may be able to achieve is an honest set of proposals.

114. (U) This cable has been cleared by A/S Fried.

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